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SUBJECT: LESSONS LEARNED FROM FINLAND'S CONVERSION TO
DIGITAL TELEVISION

[¶1.](#) (U) On September 1, 2007 Finland became one of the first countries in the world to broadcast all television signals digitally. Econoff recently sat down with Mr. Tauno Aijala, Project Manager of the switch-over at the Ministry of Transport and Communications, to gather best practices from an early adopter of digital television.

[¶2.](#) (U) Although Finland originally began broadcasting digital television signals in 2001, nearly fifty percent of Finnish households received analog terrestrial television broadcasts until a few months before the switch-over to digital transmissions last fall. Despite being a large country geographically by European standards and sparsely populated in many regions, over 99.999 percent of the Finnish public now has access to digital television broadcasts. An early adopter, Finland is well ahead of the EU mandate that all television broadcasts be digital by 2012.

[¶3.](#) (U) The digital television discussion has had a lengthy history in Finland, dating back to 1996 when the GOF issued its "resolution on digitalization". Following a series of milestones, the Finnish Parliament determined that all analogue television transmissions would cease by August 31, [¶2007](#). Although Finland is a technically savvy country, there was some measured opposition and resentment of the impending transition, particularly from the country's senior citizens. Working with key stakeholders such as TV stations, equipment manufacturers and key retailers, the GOF organized a major information campaign to educate and inform people about the digital switch-over. The stakeholders also funded a free "Digi-TV Info" helpdesk that has fielded over 100,000 calls to date. The GOF worked with local service organizations, such as the Lions Club, to provide assistance for those needing extra installation help.

[¶4.](#) (U) Preferring to use a carrot rather than a stick, the GOF accentuated the positive aspects of the switch-over including clearer transmissions and increasing the number of free channels from five to twelve. The digital conversion also made possible additional options for subtitling (Finland is a dual-language country), voice subtitling (reading the subtitles in foreign language programming), an Electronic Program Guide (EPG) and digital teletext services. However, unlike the planned U.S. conversion to digital television in February 2009, Finland did not offer any subsidies for the set-top boxes required to receive digital television.

[¶5.](#) (U) Finland has reallocated the frequency band previously used for analogue television into nine multiplexes. Currently four of the nine multiplexes are allocated for

digital television broadcasts, including one multiplex for television broadcasts to mobile devices. The remaining four have yet to be allocated; many propose using them for additional wireless services or to support emergency response communications.

¶6. (U) Critic of the Finnish conversion to digital continue to bemoan the fact that current broadcasts and many of the set-top boxes are not HDTV-ready. Hence, Finns will have to endure another migration before true HDTV broadcasts will be supported. Also, Finland's tight multiplex bandwidth allocation will further complicate the eventual move to HDTV. Likewise, many cite the lack of support for Multimedia Home Platform (MHP), something that was originally promised in the move to digital transmissions. Rather than supporting interactive TV through interoperable middleware, Finnish broadcasters instead are relying on SMS text messaging and Internet sites to provide the "interactive" component. While this approach has been quite successful in Finland, many tech-savvy Finns still say dropping support MHP was shortsighted.

¶7. (U) Lessons Learned from an Early Adopter:

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Mr. Aijala created a brief outline for interested parties highlighting Finnish best practices in the transition to digital TV. This document, entitled "Learning by Doing", has been shared with other EU countries converting to digital broadcasts. Below is a partial list of his suggestions, with Embassy edits added in brackets.

BEGIN TEXT

- ¶1. Create a brand image by using a famous actor or animated figure to promote digitalization.
- ¶2. Use only a few key points in promotions: new channels, new

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content, better quality of sounds and picture, Electronic Program Guide.

- ¶3. Only use the carrot. Don't threaten with a black screen. Keep on talking about the advantages of the new services.
 - ¶4. Hire an experienced spokesman with a TV-background (to lead the project). Strong connections to the media companies are needed.
 - ¶5. Create a panel of experts representing the (appropriate government) ministry, TV-channels, the distributors of the TV-channels, the regulatory authorities, the consumer agency, the cable TV companies, wholesalers and retailers. Gather and distribute information (extensively). Use everyone's expertise.
 - ¶6. Create a single taskforce to coordinate all aspects of the switch (over). The group needs to have power to make decisions and its own budget.
 - ¶7. National and local information services are needed to inform the consumer on proper aerial (antenna) and where to direct it.
 - ¶8. Meet the nation. Organize roadshows to visit cities. People have many questions and opinions (to share).
 - ¶9. Set up a Digi-TV Info hotline three years before the digital switch-over. (It should be) financed by all actors in the digital TV business, including wholesalers (and product manufacturers).
 - ¶10. A neutral organization is needed to test and approve (local compatibility of) set-top boxes.
 - ¶11. Make sure there are enough set-top boxes available with a variety of features and in all price ranges.
 - ¶12. Voluntary organizations are willing to help the elderly people install their boxes.
 - ¶13. Research (market) penetration, (consumer) attitudes, (product) reliability and price ranges.
 - ¶14. Make the decisions concerning (broadcast) frequencies on time. Terrestrial network operators need time (to prepare systems).
- END TEXT

¶8. (U) Comment: Mr. Aijala candidly shared insightful

comments about areas in which Finland could have improved its implementation. He will soon be traveling to a number of countries to share best practices from Finland's conversion to digital broadcasting, and he has expressed willingness to visit with interested parties in the U.S. in the future. Econoff has a series of presentations in digital format that are available to interested parties (contact lewisgk@state.gov). End comment.
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